



# WA Cane Toad Update

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## In this issue

- 🦎 Cane toad gender mix-up
- 🦎 Cane toad hotline goes WILD
- 🦎 Wet season rains dry up
- 🦎 Students head hunt toads
- 🦎 Cane toad handling techniques

## Cane toad gender mix-up

Scientists in Florida believe synthetic chemicals in heavily farmed areas may be responsible for causing male cane toads to display female-like qualities, making it increasingly difficult to determine their gender.

A two-year field study (*Agriculture Alters Gonadal Form and Function in Bufo marinus* 2008) has revealed that intersex conditions found in amphibians are associated with agricultural land use, and the greater the intensity of agriculture the higher the proportion of abnormal toads.

Cane toads have been widespread in Florida and the south-east United States since the mid-1900s.

In the most heavily farmed area, almost 40 per cent of male toads had abnormalities that make them less male and more like females.

Males generally look different to females, as they have a different colour pattern, thicker forearms and nuptial pads, which are skin patches located on their thumbs that aid in mating with females.

The research found that male toads from the five separate agricultural sites studied had female colouration called mottling (the degree of mottling increased with the level of agriculture) and significantly smaller forearms than males taken from non-farming areas.

Many synthetic chemicals found in the environment act as oestrogen hormones. These contaminants can cause female-like qualities in males if they have been exposed to them during development.

To read the full report visit: <http://ehp03.niehs.nih.gov/article/info:doi/10.1289/ehp.11536>.



A male toad found in Bayswater in 2011 that has female colour characteristics.

## Cane toad hotline goes WILD

The cane toad hotline will soon be ringing to a different tune when it switches to a new number.

The Department of Environment and Conservation's (DEC) volunteer Wildcare Helpline will be used to assist people with enquiries about suspected cane toad sightings.

DEC State Cane Toad Initiative program coordinator Corrin Everitt said the new hotline number, 1800 44 WILD (9453), would be staffed by volunteers, seven days a week.

"The volunteers will be available to provide advice and guidance to anyone who believes they may have seen an invasive pest in WA, in an area where they are not commonly seen," she said.

"Previously, anyone who had a cane toad enquiry was directed to the Pest and Disease Information Services line at the WA Department of Agriculture and Food.

"Operating under a new central number will improve efficiency and avoid the double handling of information between different organisations."

The cane toad hotline has been busy since cane toads first crossed the WA-NT border in early 2009, and last year alone the hotline received more than 120 enquiries about cane toads.

Corrin said with cane toads moving further into the state, the department continued to receive calls about suspected hitchhiker cane toads.

"The invasive pest is very good at hiding in small spaces so it's important for people to remain vigilant and thoroughly check their vehicle, caravan and camping equipment if they are travelling through areas where cane toads are known to live.

"We also strongly encourage residents to call the cane toad hotline to confirm that the animal they have sighted is actually a cane toad and not a harmless native frog.

"Up to two-thirds of suspected cane toads turn out to be harmless native frogs so it's important for people to phone us and have the animal correctly identified."



Volunteer Tanya Marwood attending to a public enquiry about wildlife.



# WA Cane Toad Update



## Wet season rains dry up

With another wet season drawing to an end, the DEC State cane toad team in Kununurra will resume monitoring and surveillance work across the north-west.

The region experienced a mild wet season, with below average rainfall between November and January. However, further heavy rain forecast for later in 2012 is expected to result in significant cane toad movement.

In the coming months, the cane toad team will work with community groups and the local community to manage cane toads in priority areas when access is established. This includes areas within the World Heritage listed Purnululu National Park.



## Students head hunt toads

Kimberley students have been getting involved in the cane toad action by helping to seek out the invasive species around their school grounds.

Students from Kununurra District High School (KDHS) spent an evening with DEC wildlife officers and teachers hunting toads.

Senior wildlife officer Rick Dawson said within about two hours they had collected more than 130 toads.

"It was great to get students involved in the community effort. They had great fun hunting for toads while learning a little bit about them," he said.

"These types of activities are fantastic in helping to educate young people about cane toads and their impact on the environment."

Wyndham District High School Bush Rangers have also been helping to lead the fight against cane toads since they arrived in the northern Kimberley town during the wet season.

Regional Bush Rangers coordinator Sally Johnston said the school-based program enabled students to plan and carry out practical conservation projects within their school and local community.

"Bush Rangers is DEC's branch of Cadets WA, a youth development program for secondary students with a focus on teamwork, leadership, initiative and community involvement," she said.

"The Wyndham cadets, who include students from years seven to nine, spent the second semester of 2011 learning about cane toads and the impact they can have on native species.



KDHS students capturing toads around the school grounds.

# WA Cane Toad Update



... continued from page 2

"This was done through a series of overnight workshops and 'toadbusts' with the Kimberley Toad Busters. The Bush Rangers were well prepared when the toads came to town at the start of the year, and they continue to work with community groups in their surrounding area."

Wyndham Bush Rangers unit leader Cameron Hart said by looking at the cane toad and its impacts, students ultimately became engaged in wider environmental issues.

Further afield in Fitzroy Crossing, Derby and Broome, Bush Rangers are already learning about the invasive pest and have engaged with a variety of biodiversity monitoring projects that will help in assessing the impact of the toad population as it moves across the Kimberley.



Wyndham Bush Ranger cadet Ashley Daniels on a hunt for toads.

## Cane toad handling techniques

Be careful when handling cane toads to avoid coming into contact with toxins.

DEC officer Jasper Kruse said when removing cane toads people should always wear gloves, pick them up by their back legs and hold them away from the face.

"Toxin is produced in their shoulder glands and is present in the skin on their backs. When squirted, the toxin can cause pain and severe irritation to the eyes, or temporary visual disturbance," he said.

"If toxin is squirted into the mouth, immediately flush the mouth with water and take the patient to the emergency department of the nearest hospital.

"When swallowed, the toxin may affect the heart, blood pressure and breathing."



When handling cane toads direct them away from your face to prevent being squirted in the eyes with toxins.



For more information on cane toad poisoning, contact the Poisons Information Line on 13 11 26 anywhere in Australia, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

For information contact the DEC cane toad team on 9168 4200 or email [corrin.everitt@dec.wa.gov.au](mailto:corrin.everitt@dec.wa.gov.au)

